Summary of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) guidance on ethical, professional decision making in the COVID-19 pandemic for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians working in all areas of healthcare

The above guidance was published by RPS on the 8th April 2020 and is intended for use by all sectors of the pharmacy profession and by staff in both strategic roles and those in roles closer to patients to support ethical, professional decision making in the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The principles within this document are intended to apply to everyone providing pharmacy services recognising the importance of the whole pharmacy team working as one.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide support to pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to make decisions in these exceptional circumstances and to also provide some reassurance that uncomfortable decisions made are sound and defensible.

The guidance advises that any decisions we make should be:

- Based on the best evidence available at the time
- Reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances
- Made in accordance with the latest government, NHS, regulatory and professional guidance and should take account of employers' guidance
- Made as collaboratively as possible, remembering that every decision made will impact on others, both patients and professionals
- Designed to secure safe and effective patient care as far as practicable
- Timely, recognising that pressure of time means that rather than striving for perfection, decisions may have to be "good enough for the circumstances"
- Recorded, including the reasons why decisions were made to ensure accountability and understanding of prevailing circumstances at the time

The document contains some guidance on structured decision making and some more specific examples relevant to the current pandemic. It provides guidance on the following:

a) Professional Decision-Making
b) Ethical Framework for Decision Making
c) Guidance relating to specific issues
   - Maintaining patient safety
   - Maintaining the safety of staff and volunteers
   - Working outside normal areas of specialism and/or competence
   - Allocating scarce supplies of medicines and devices
   - Following of legislative requirements
   - Record keeping
   - Direct and indirect discrimination in decision making
   - Moral Distress
   - Managing patients remotely
   - Procurement and distribution
   - Leadership
   - Research /Experimental treatments
   - Repurposing of medicines
   - Learning and improvement
Of note within the document are the following useful boxes:

- **Page 5** - Professional decision making model which has been adapted for emergency circumstances from Exercising Professional Judgment RPS Medicines, Ethics and Practice Guide.
  - Having a systematic approach allows professionals to account for the decisions they make. In times of crisis, this approach is offered as a useful support tool to fall back on.
  - Each of the factors listed may be adapted to take account of the prevailing circumstances and the time available.
  - Decision-making is often improved through collaborative discussion where possible and time allows.
  - Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should be reassured that should decisions be called into question at a later date, they will be judged according to the circumstances at the time of the decision, not with the benefit of hindsight.

- **Page 6** – Ethical values adapted from “Pandemic flu planning information for England and the devolved administrations, including guidance for organisations and businesses.”
  - On the public’s behalf, the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) expect pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to uphold their standards, recognising that how this is achieved may look very different in the context of the present challenge, compared to normal times.
  - In broad principle these ethical values reflect a just perspective under the philosophy that everyone matters and that everyone matters equally.

**Further information**

1. Clicking on the picture below opens the full RPS guidance on ethical, professional decision making in the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. In addition this guidance can be supported by the RPS Medicines, Ethics and Practice which is available free of charge to non-RPS members during COVID-19 pandemic (click on picture below and need to register for access).

3. The latest guidance on issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found at [https://www.rpharms.com/coronavirus/](https://www.rpharms.com/coronavirus/)